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ABSTRACT

This national and state review provides a synthesis of current thinking and practice concerning prekindergarten programs in public schools. Section I discusses the need for preschool programs in terms of the changing family and workforce, the baby "boomlet," and socioeconomic factors. Section II reviews early childhood programs, discussing current trends, early influences, Head Start, social functions of preschool programs, exemplary programs for disadvantaged children, effects of preschool programs, and characteristics of high quality programs. Section III surveys preschool prekindergarten school programs and services. The survey considers the national perspective, state legislation, characteristics of state-sponsored programs, teacher qualifications, class size and ratios, curriculum, eligibility, services for at-risk children, and programs in Virginia, Tennessee, West Virginia, and Kentucky. Section IV explores implications for policy initiatives. Discussion focuses on benefits of prekindergarten programs, the role of schools, the role of the federal government, legislation enabling preschool programs for at-risk children, the Education of the Handicapped Act, the coordination of state-sponsored programs, state involvement considerations, and other considerations. Appendices provide data on the percentage of 3-, 4-, and 5-year-old children enrolled in preprimary programs in the United States between October 1964 and October 1984, and representative state program funding allocations for 1985-1986. (RH)

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Prekindergarten Programs in Public Schools: A National and State Review

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INTRODUCTION

Recent research on early childhood education indicates dramatic and lasting gains to children and society as a result of quality prekindergarten programs for children. In particular, "at-risk" children--those from economically deprived homes, single-parent families, two-job families, isolated rural families; members of minority groups; and/or physically, socially, emotionally, or cognitively handicapped--gain substantial benefits from early intervention programs. These research findings are well documented and are, in several states, influencing new educational policies.

Economically, these findings strongly indicate that quality educational programs for disadvantaged children can result in significant savings for the public. Reduced school failure, a lower rate of dropouts, and a reduction in later delinquency and crime are among the benefits society derives from quality prekindergarten programs.

I. THE NEED FOR PRESCHOOL PROGRAMS

A very important social revolution now confronts early childhood education and the schools. This revolution forces schools to examine and, in many instances, expand their current range of programs and services. Throughout the nation, broadcast media, newspapers, journals, state legislative offices, and government agencies fervently analyze and publicize this rapid social revolution, which has elicited a wide variety and staggering numbers of proposals to serve prekindergarten children in public schools.

Three significant societal trends are major contributors to the current public and legislative concern in the area of early childhood education: (1) the changing nature of the family and, consequently, the workforce; (2) the continuing expansion of the infant and early childhood populations; and (3) the declining socioeconomic status of United States families.

The Changing Family and Workforce

Two-career families and working single parents increasingly characterize the lifestyles of American families. Half of all mothers with infants under one year of age now work outside the home. Nearly 60 percent of mothers with children ages three to five are employed outside the home; more than two-thirds of this population work fulltime. By 1990, according to one estimate, nine out of ten mothers (single or married) will be in the workforce. For the large majority of American families, adequate child care services, resultantly, are not a luxury but a necessity.

The Baby Boomlet

In the United States, the baby boom population (post World War II babies) has significantly contributed to the "baby boomlet" phenomenon, a rapidly expanding number of infants and preschool children. According to a report from Congress' Select Committee on Children and Families, the number of children under age six is projected to grow to nearly 23 million by 1990, a rise of between three and four million children in four years. According to the U. S. Department of Education's Current Population Reports, in 1964, 4.3 percent of three-year-olds, 14.9 percent of four-year-olds, and 58.1 percent of five-year-olds were enrolled in preprimary programs. In 1984, the percentages were 27.8, 44.8, and 83.9, respectively. In the years between 1977 and 1985, a 300 percent rise of preschool children enrolled in some type of child care transpired (see Appendix A).

The range of preschool services includes day care centers, group day care homes, family day care homes, public school prekindergarten (including Head Start) programs, and independent school prekindergarten programs. The large majority of children receiving child care services in the United States are enrolled in family day care homes. The demand for all types of preschool programs, however, far exceeds the number now available, and the situation appears to be worsening. Because of the current demographic trends, the rise in demand for child care is expected to escalate even more markedly within the next four years.

Socioeconomic Factors

A third national trend is the rising proportion of children born

into poverty. Thirteen million children--one in every four--are now born into a family whose income falls at or below the poverty level; this proportion is rapidly increasing. Because of declining average wages (down 15 percent since 1973) and the move toward parttime work with minimal, if any, health benefits, working parents are less able to afford the costs of child care, or even minimally-acceptable food, shelter, and medical care for their children.

Among the growing poverty groups are families with young children in which one or both parents work fulltime. In 1984, 2.5 million children lived in poverty-level homes in which at least one parent was employed outside the home. These children, in particular, tend to be deprived of adequate adult support systems.

Because of their higher birthrates, their younger age distributions, and their rapid immigration, minority Americans who are Hispanic, Black, and Asian will soon constitute a majority in many cities. For poverty-level children who are also members of racial and/or linguistic minorities, the plight is serious. Greater poverty levels are associated with lower standards of nutrition, health care, and education. A greater incidence of homelessness and despair, as opportunities and options are foreclosed, tends to result.

Because of the current demographic, social, and economic trends that characterize the United States, the provision of adequate public services for all children and youth is one of the nation's most challenging and eminent priorities. Prekindergarten programs in public schools have become, for several states, the most feasible and realistic alternative.

II. REVIEW OF EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS

Current Trends

The social revolution, which propels mothers of young children into the workforce, is one of the major contributors to the deluge of task forces, committees, and proposals to explore the issue of prekindergarten programs in public schools. Other sources, such as data from early intervention projects and the National Educational Reform Reports, offer additional contributions to the current flood of interest.

Head Start data and other evaluations of early intervention programs, such as the High/Scope Perry Preschool Project, reveal significant correlations between disadvantaged children's participation in high quality preschool programs and their later educational success and employment records. Further, the recent National Educational Reform Reports indicate an increased national awareness of, and concern for, the educational progress of America's children.

Early Influences

Within the past twenty years, the American public has begun to view early childhood programs as a necessity. In the 1960s, the writings of Benjamin Bloom and J. McVicker Hunt triggered a new outlook on early childhood education. Intelligence was considered to be elastic and preschool experiences were determined to be the best means by which this elastic capacity might be exercised.

Head Start

The 1965 emergence of the federally-funded Head Start program for

disadvantaged children inspired the nationwide development of curriculum models for early childhood education. Funding, evaluation procedures, and technical expertise were plentiful as the desire to cognitize and socialize children mounted.

The Head Start program was, to a large extent, also responsible for the comprehensive range of services which continue to influence quality early childhood programs in the eighties. Head Start, along with data provided by Urie Bronfenbrenner, led researchers to the realization that the child does not exist in a state of cognitive isolation; rather, a host of social, health, and nutritional influences merge to determine the ultimate benefits a child gleans from a preschool program.

Social Functions of Preschool Programs

The perception of quality in early childhood programming has expanded beyond the individual child, the teacher, and the classroom. Quality early childhood education now includes a wide array of services--to the child, the parent, the family, and the community.

In the past, schools used to maintain that early childhood education fell outside their realm of responsibility. Increasingly, however, schools are beginning to recognize their role in helping children to get started on a "success track," even before the onset of kindergarten. Moreover, early education programs in schools reduce the need for special education services and perform a broader "social function," according to David Weikart, president of the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation in Ypsilanti, Michigan. A High/Scope study found, for example, that for every dollar spent on early education programs for

disadvantaged children, seven dollars are saved in terms of reductions in school failures, dropouts, unemployment, crime, and other problems. Weikart adds that, once schools realize the results of the "achievement cycle," the payoff continues.

Exemplary Programs for Disadvantaged Children

Both the Head Start program and the High Scope/Perry Preschool Project were initiated in the 1960s. Each was based on the belief that early intervention would contribute to low-income children's intellectual and social growth. In both cases, long-term research revealed that the significance of the preschool experience was not found in enduringly elevated IQ scores; however, disadvantaged children enrolled in the Perry Preschool Program were less likely to be kept back in school and less likely to be placed in a special education class. In fact, the 1984 report indicated that 67 percent of the youngsters who attended the Perry Preschool later graduated from high school, while only 47 percent of the children who had not attended preschool graduated. It was concluded that providing children with a cognitively enriched and stimulating preschool environment helped disadvantaged children develop a sense of preparedness that would positively affect their subsequent school experience.

Findings of longitudinal studies on the Tennessee-based Early Training Project, conducted from 1963 to 1965, helped to confirm those of other program results. The ten-week summer program, developed by Gray, Ramsey, and Klaus, concentrated on enhancing disadvantaged children's language aptitude and school attitudes. The most significant and enduring difference was in the lower numbers of experimental children

later placed in special education classes. Researchers suggested that the Early Training Project aided the children's positive school attitude development and, hence, the overall benefits gleaned from their school experience.

Effects of Preschool Programs

In answer to the continuing controversy over the lasting effects of preschool programs, the Consortium for Longitudinal Studies was formed in 1975. Surveying over one thousand disadvantaged children from 11 projects (including the Perry Preschool and Early Training Projects), the Consortium found that children who participated in preschool programs:

- increased their IQ scores significantly;
- maintained IQ gains for three to four years;
- scored higher on reading achievement tests through the third grade;
- scored higher on math tests through the fifth grade;
- were placed less frequently in special education classrooms throughout school;
- were more likely, each school year, to be promoted; and
- were more likely to earn a high school diploma.

Characteristics of Quality Programs

The Consortium noted several common characteristics of the preschool programs that were likely to have contributed to gains of the participants:

- Intervention is begun early in the child's life--at birth, or as soon as possible after a disability is recognized.
- Services are extended to parents.

- Home visits are included.
- Parents are involved in the child's instruction.
- Teacher-child ratios are low.
- An established curriculum is applied.
- Staff training is implemented.
- Program assessment and monitoring transpires regularly and frequently.

III. SURVEY OF PREKINDERGARTEN SCHOOL PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

The National Perspective

By 1990, the nation's public schools will educate 1.3 million more children under the age of 15 than they did a decade earlier. One out of every four of these school children will live in a single parent family. Given these numbers and the changing needs of American families, the schools have begun to expand their services to include day care, after-school programs, provisions for special needs children, and parent training programs.

In order to obtain a comprehensive view of the types of services and programs state departments of education are providing for four-year-olds, data was collected from several representative states using a structured telephone interview, correspondence, or direct contact. Additional information about several states was provided by Sharon L. Kagan, director of New York City's "Giant Step" early education project. Data on prekindergarten programs for Virginia, Tennessee, West Virginia, and Kentucky were supplied by the respective state departments of education and the Appalachia Educational Laboratory, Charleston, West Virginia.

The collective results indicate that:

- No state currently provides universal school-sponsored programs for prekindergarten children.
- Almost half the states have begun initiatives to fund early education programs.
- In 15 states and the District of Columbia, the federal government contributes partial funds for initiating and sustaining preschool programs; another six states have begun similar initiatives.

- Pilot programs of limited scope and duration characterize the majority of operational programs in which state funding is involved.
- Often the constraints on federal funds make them available only for handicapped, low-income, and in some cases non-English-speaking children.
- Several state departments of education, including those of Maryland and Missouri, offer services other than direct prekindergarten program involvement, such as the provision of resource guides for parents.

State Legislation

According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, early childhood education was one of the most fruitful legislative areas for the states in 1984. Included among the states in which program initiatives extend well beyond the isolated model are (in order of most-to-least 1985-86 financial commitment) California, New York, South Carolina, New Jersey, Minnesota, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, and Oklahoma.

In 1985, California spent 32 million dollars on child care and preschool projects, many of which are located in public schools. New York was next in financial commitment, spending 20 million dollars to serve 50,000 children in public schools. Although Minnesota and New Jersey both spent four million, 50,000 children were served in Minnesota while only 1,000 were served in New Jersey. The primary recipients of the funding in Minnesota were community education programs for parents who, in turn, support children; the children in New Jersey were directly served in self-contained classrooms. Ohio, Illinois, Texas, Michigan, Oregon, Washington, and Florida have also begun to expend significant state funding for early education in public schools. The Maryland state

board of education recently requested from the Maryland legislature an expansion of funding from 2 million to 14 million dollars, which would enable 60 percent of the state's four-year-olds to attend a prekindergarten program.

Prekindergarten programs are funded through general education funds in New Jersey and Pennsylvania, where payments to districts are the same for both prekindergarten and kindergarten programs. In contrast, other states limit their funding to budget appropriations for programs. Typically, annual state support is less than $1,000 per child for part-day programs; however, funds may reach as high as $2,700 per child.

Some states require local school districts to contribute to program or staff funding. In New York, local school districts contribute 11 percent of the total budget, while local Michigan school districts contribute 30 percent. Local participating school districts provide staff funding in Ohio.

Characteristics of State-Sponsored Programs

Although most prekindergarten programs are part-day (three or fewer hours per day), some states have either implemented full-day programs for four-year-olds or plan to do so within the next decade.

When programs operate on the general school code, kindergarten standards for student attendance and teacher certification apply. States that provide funding for kindergarten programs through regulations and legislative initiatives typically address staff qualifications, class size, and staff-child ratios. In many instances, the regulations are similar, if not identical, to requirements enforced in the state's privately sponsored day care centers and/or preschools.

Teacher Qualifications

Early childhood certification is required for teachers in the majority of prekindergarten programs. In fact, most programs require specialized training beyond what is typically specified for kindergarten teachers in the state.

Class Size and Ratios

In most states, a maximum of 20 youngsters is allowable. Class size specifications vary widely, however, from a low of 15 children per class to a high of 25 children. The typical staff-child ratio is no higher than 1:10 when class size is 20 and both a teacher and a fulltime aide are assigned.

Curriculum

A typical prekindergarten half-day schedule includes meeting of children, snack, learning centers, large group instruction, outdoor play, and storytime. Programs for "at-risk" children, however, may vary from the typical schedule to include more skill development and/or remediation activities.

Eligibility

Several states offer public school programs to three-and four year-olds, although the majority of state-sponsored prekindergarten programs enroll only four-year-old children. Age is the only criterion for eligibility in several states, such as New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Oklahoma. In Maryland and Massachusetts, eligibiity is determined by age but limited to those school districts in which prekindergarten programs are offered.

Many school programs are targeted specifically for "at-risk" children. "At-risk" status is determined by (1) environmental or other risk conditions and/or (2) the results of screening tests. Programs for at-risk children are now funded in Louisiana, South Carolina, New York, Maine, Massachusetts, Florida, Texas, and Illinois (see Appendix B), among other states.

Services for At-Risk Children

At-risk children, as defined by the Virginia department of education, are "those children from a disadvantaged environment, whose life experiences fail to develop language competence, adaptive behaviors, strong self-concept, and values related to perseverance and responsibility [who are] likely to be unsuccessful in academic tasks required by the school." Although definitions of "at-risk" vary from state to state, several states have begun to expend significant state monies for specific groups of disadvantaged children and their parents.

Texas, for example, passed legislation in 1985 (H.B. 72) that requires school districts to screen kindergarten children. In any district where 15 children are found to have developmental delays, a prekindergarten program for all four-year-old children is mandated. As a result of additional legislation in Texas, mandating early education in the public schools for low-income and non-English-speaking children, the Austin Early Education Program was established. The Austin Program now serves as a model for other state prekindergarten programs.

In its Education Improvement Act of 1984, South Carolina required the state board of education to implement programs for four-year-olds who manifest "significant readiness deficiencies."

In 1986-87, Massachusetts is providing over ten million dollars in grants to local school systems for early childhood programs for three-and four-year-olds living in low-income areas. For the first time, the state department of education is also providing funding for staffing and wages in existing Head Start programs.

In addition, according to a recent Massachusetts law, Chapter 766 (effective in September 1986), "every special needs child must, at three years of age, receive services." The presence of a "special need" is determined by the Administration of Special Education and includes a "temporary or permanent disability" in one or more of these areas: intellectual, sensory, emotional, physical, cerebral, perceptual, and/or learning. State and federal funding supports these services for special needs youngsters.

In Rhode Island, federal and state department of human services funds provide a mandatory "Work Incentives" program. While adolescent mothers attend half-day classes in public schools addressing such topics as nutrition, parenting, and child development, their preschool children attend day care housed at the same sites.

Handicapped children in Rhode Island (including those who manifest learning, speech, hearing, or behavior disabilities) receive special services under the state-funded "Child Find" program. Qualifying preschoolers, ages three to five years, are served by special education diagnosticians and psychologists in public schools throughout the state on a half-day basis. In addition, parents of handicapped children enrolled in the program attend weekly workshops at the school sites.

Virginia

In its quest for excellence in its educational system, the report of Virginia's Governor's Commission on Education identified two obstacles: (1) presently a wide disparity exists among Virginia's school divisions in the quality and scope of educational programs; and (2) twenty-five percent of the state's ninth-grade students do not graduate from high school; thus, three-quarters of a million of Virginia's citizens may be functionally illiterate in today's society. Low educational achievement, illiteracy, and dropout problems are typically identfied with students from socially- and economically-deprived backgrounds.

In an effort to prevent students from encountering the same problems that have plagued their parents, the Commission's report was presented to the Governor in November 1986. The Commission was composed of half state board of education members and half influential members-at-large (present or former representatives of the general assembly). One of the Commission's recommendations was that Virginia provide voluntary developmental preschool programs for at-risk four-year-olds.

The state department of education is proceeding on the basis of the Commission's recommendation to devise a plan for implementing such programs. Virginia has been chosen as one of four states to receive technical assistance in early childhood education from the National Association of State Boards of Education. As a result of this assistance, the state will begin to implement its preschool program; programs for at-risk four-year-olds will be offered by September 1988, with programs for all four-year-olds targeted for September 1992.

Virginia currently has some local programs serving prekindergarten

children, including Chapter I and Head Start programs in public schools. However, these programs do not receive direct funding from the state department of education; rather, federal monies largely support the existing programs for disadvantaged children.

Tennessee

Tennessee has developed a model program for at-risk four-year-olds. Schools identify at-risk children during preregistration for kindergarten, using a state developmental screening model.

Caldwell School in Nashville has a full-year program for these at-risk four-year olds. In addition, five school systems in Tennessee piloted a six-week summer program in 1985-86. The pilot program, entitled Project STEP (Success Through Early Programs), was targeted for educationally "at-risk" children, four or five years of age, who would attend kindergarten in the fall. The goal of the pilot program was to enhance the individual child's development, enabling their kindergarten experiences to become more meaningful. A cognitive-learning model that emphasizes the importance of the child's developmental readiness was used. Career ladder II and III teachers were hired to administer the projects. The objectives of the state-funded prekindergarten program were threefold:

- to provide a supportive environment that promotes children's social/emotional, language, cognitive, and thinking skills development;
- to enable all children to reach their developmental potential; and
- to teach children how to learn, not just what to learn.

For the summer projects, the state department of education allocated funds for the following in pilot schools:

- teachers' salaries and benefits;
- teacher aides' salaries and benefits;
- materials and supplies: $350 per classroom;
- teacher and aide training: three days; and
- administrative support: assistance in identification of students, tacher and aide training, parent training, and data collection.

The local education agency allocated sufficient funds for the following services in pilot schools:

- utilities: operation and maintenance of the school site;
- clerical assistance: typing and record-keeping;
- school administration: a school principal or his/her designee; and
- instructional materials and equipment (including playground equipment).

Parents of students in the pilot programs were responsible for the following:

- transportation arrangements; and
- costs of lunch and snacks.

Research data indicated significant gains by participating children, both immediately afterwards and midway through the kindergarten year. Two of the school systems held postkindergarten programs for the participating children in the summer of 1986.

Tennessee's state department of education plans to continue pilot testing the summer program. The model is available statewide; however, state funding for the additional programs is limited to teachers' salaries.

The Healthy Children Task Force, an interagency group that has been studying children's health issues for the past six years, has developed an infant followup process. The procedure helps identify children at risk of developmental delay and provides voluntary tracking by local health departments to ensure that appropriate services are received.

West Virginia

One of the targets recently set by West Virginia's board of education involves the early identification of high-risk preschoolers. The department of education is collaborating with the health department to implement early identification and intervention programs for prenatal through age five children. Formation of a task force to address these efforts is now underway.

The department of education funds combination home/center programs in four sites in the state. Each location serves approximately 15 at-risk three- to five-year-olds. Criteria for "at-risk" in West Virginia considers both family income and the child's developmental delay. Medical and dental screenings and followup services are provided when applicable.

These home/center program sites previously housed state-funded day care centers; the home/center model replaced the day care model in 1983-84. The department also contracts with nonprofit agencies to provide home-based services to preschoolers in two areas of the state.

In 1985, the legislature appropriated approximately $1 million per year for educational programs for severely and profoundly handicapped three- and four-year-olds. Local school districts selected one model from the six available models for serving their handicapped children.

After a planning year in 1985-86, programs for four-year-olds were implemented in 1986-87. Services targeted for 1987-88 will also include three-year-old youngsters. The department's recently developed "Criteria of Excellence" includes guidelines for preschool education programs.

Kentucky

In August 1985, the Kentucky general assembly adopted legislation that directed the board of education to formulate state policy for early childhood education and development. As a result, the state board of education created the Early Childhood Education and Development Task Force. The report of the task force, released in December 1985, contained the following specific recommendations:

- Establish an Office of Child Development within the Governor's office to coordinate early childhood programs.
- Form a Governor's Interagency Council on Early Childhood Education and Development to conduct comprehensive policymaking for early childhood programs.
- Form an Interagency Advisory Committee of professionals, advocates, and lay people, to advise the Council and develop a five-year planning document.

Recently the state department of education (Office for Exceptional Children) allocated $25,000 to the preschool program of Jefferson County public schools. The grant was the first given by the state to a public school system for such a purpose; its goal was to defray some of the operating expenses and, thus, to avoid tuition increases or cuts in programs. Fifty of the 280 students in the preschool program are physically or mentally handicapped. The program serves three-, four-, and five-year-old youngsters at 12 schools. School officials are still attempting to secure additional funding to cover the many families who cannot afford tuition.

In state after state, throughout the nation, policymakers and administrators are reflecting similar sentiments: the sooner handicapped children are given access to programs that meet their special needs, the better prepared they are to function well in the school setting. Quality preschool experiences are important for all children but they are most necessary, effective, and important for handicapped, minority, and other "at-risk" children.

IV. IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY INITIATIVES

Benefits of Prekindergarten Programs

The role of state education agencies in prekindergarten education is becoming more dominant. There is by no means, however, a single rationale for the inclusion of prekindergarten programs in schools; nor is there a single approach to programming for four-year-olds enrolled in public school programs.

The potential benefits derived from a formal (part-day or full-day) program, a parent training program, and/or an extended day program are numerous. When prekindergarten programs are offered by public schools, the potential gains to children, their families, and to the community often include the following:

- Prekindergarten programs help to reverse declining enrollment in public schools.
- Prekindergarten programs attract parents of young children to the school, thus laying the foundation for active parent involvement.
- When prekindergarten programs are set up in the schools with the cooperation of the local government, the programs are eligible to receive financial assistance from the federal government (Public Law 96-399).
- Prekindergarten programs can achieve court-ordered desegregation. (In Lawton, Oklahoma, for example, children from all sections of town attend a special "school for working parents.")
- Prekindergarten programs enable schools to better serve their communities' needs--economically and effectively.
- Prekindergarten programs enable school districts to retain competent employees and put fewer people out of work.

- Prekindergarten programs provide an opportunity for all schools to work with local industries and businesses. In some locations, business provides the funding for preschool education; school systems provide the personnel.

The Role of Schools

Programs for the public school education of four-year-olds are not universally or unequivocally advocated. According to Sharon Lynn Kagan, the American system of child care and early education is complex enough without the systematic involvement of the public schools in providing direct services to all four-year-olds. Short of providing an education for all preschool children, schools can effectively and realistically be available to all low-income, handicapped, and non-English-dominant children whose parents desire such services. For those children who do not fall in the "at risk" category, full- or part-day programs are frequently offered, on a sliding fee basis, to fill the needs of working parents.

The current roles of schools in prekindergarten programming vary markedly. Among the most frequent services offered by public schools to preschool children are: (1) full-day or part-day child care; (2) physical, intellectual, language, and socio-emotional screening; (3) parent education programs; (4) toy lending libraries; and (5) referral services. In addition, some public schools offer taped telephone services, providing practical information on childrearing problems; others offer newsletters or clothing/book exchanges.

The Role of the Federal Government

Recently the federal government has become more actively involved in helping to support programs for prekindergarten children. For instance,

New York City's "Giant Step" public schooling program for four-year-olds will receive 27 percent of its funding from the federal government. The city will be responsible for 35 percent and the state 38 percent of the program's funds.

In response to the April 1983 report, "A Nation At Risk," Terrel H. Bell, past secretary of education, advocated that the federal government continue to play a vital and supportive role in assisting states, local communities, and private institutions as they carry out their educational responsibilties. This role should include leadership, advocacy, and special assistance, particularly to help educate handicapped, minority, and disadvantaged children. He further recommended that the role of the federal government include supporting and supplementing states, localities, and private education without intruding into the control, direction, and management of education enterprise. According to Bell, current efforts to reform and renew schools cannot meet with success without the participation and leadership of the federal government.

Enabling Legislation: Preschool Programs for "At-Risk" Children

Massachusetts Chapter 766, effective in September 1986, was the first instance of a state or federal mandate to include, among children entitled to and eligible for public education, all three- and four-year-old children with special needs. Prior to Chapter 766, special education programs for three- and four-year olds in public schools were practically nonexistent. The Massachusetts legislature specified provisions for handicapped children from birth through three years of age and their families in 1983. Efforts to establish a network of early intervention

programs, regulations, and monitoring systems are now underway in several other states, in answer to current legislation for disadvantaged children.

Education of the Handicapped Act

In the school year 1990-91, all rights and protections of P.L. 94-142 (Education of the Handicapped Act [EHA], Part B) are extended to handicapped children ages three through five years. For this age group, thus, the prior Preschool Incentive Grant program (P. L. 94-142, Sec. 619) is revised to reflect authorization of a dramatic increase in the federal fiscal contribution.

Failure of any state to comply with the provision of a free public education to all handicapped children ages three through five will result in the loss of the following:

- funds available through the new Preschool Grant;
- monies generated under P. L. 94-142; and
- grants and contracts related to preschool education under the EHA discretionary programs.

The new program will be administered through the state and local education agencies. Contracts with other programs and agencies, however, may be arranged to provide a wider range of service models.

Early intervention services must include, for each eligible child, a multidisciplinary assessment and an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP). The child's parents and a multidisciplinary team write the plan, which must be designed to meet developmental needs and may include such services as special education, family training services, physical therapy, psychological services, diagnostic medical services, and transition services.

Federal funds under this program are to be used for the planning, development, and implementation of a statewide system of early intervention services. In addition, states may apply the funds to the general expansion and improvement of such services.

Coordination of State-Sponsored Programs

State programs reflect a wide range of educational concerns, such as limited availability of federal funds and a growing concern for meeting the needs of all children who appear to be "at risk" for later school failure. As state-sponsored prekindergarten programs become more widespread, sensitivity mounts regarding their effects on existing programs under federal or private sponsorship. In answer to this concern, South Carolina has organized an Interagency Coordinating Council; other states have also expressed interest in developing interagency collaboration.

South Carolina, Illinois, and Michigan, for example, allow school districts to contract with agencies outside the public schools to provide preschool programs. Legislation in Ohio provides for grants to county school boards to establish family services such as referral and information dissemination.

In Michigan, state school law provides that the board of a school district may establish preprimary, nursery school, or approved day care programs and may provide suitable rooms, teachers, and equipment. Additionally, the board may charge tuition and accept federal funds specified for the prekindergarten program. The age at which a child may enroll in such programs is also determined by the board. State school

law in Michigan further specifies that "there shall be cooperative arrangements with the state departments of social welfare, health, and mental health to assure maximum utilization of such agencies in providing necessary health and welfare services for children receiving day care." Several states are now committed to fostering interagency cooperation, especially in planning, implementing, and evaluating programs and services.

The 1984-85 recommendations for the state of Connecticut (prepared by the Committee on Four-Year-Olds, Their Families, and the Public Schools) advocated that the state board of education take leadership in: (1) funding eight demonstration districts; (2) supporting parent education programs; (3) coordinating existing and proposed programs and services; (4) establishing equitable credentialing alternatives; (5) providing a single statewide data base on the status of the state's children; and (6) launching and funding a statewide information campaign to inform Connecticut's citizens about the importance and cost-effectiveness of early childhood services and programs.

As the role of state education agencies unfolds, important programming considerations shape the nature of the state's involvement in education. These considerations include:

- establishing equity and equal access for all children;
- increasing quantity and quality;
- meeting community needs;
- providing flexibility of programming and services;
- disseminating information to the public;
- credentialing individuals and programs;

- establishing a data base; and
- involving, educating, and supporting the family.

State Involvement Considerations

1. Establishing Equity and Equal Access: Preschool programs and services are not currently available to all children. Cost, eligibility requirements, lack of trained staff, geographic inaccessibility, and lack of enrollment space are hindrances to the equal and equitable distribution of services. State departments of education are taking more active roles to ensure equity and equal access for all needy children, including those who are members of economic and racial minorities.
2. Increasing Quantity and Quality: Demographic trends, including the number of women in the workforce, the number of children born, and the number of children born into poverty (disproportionately high among minority groups), indicate a need for more quantity and quality in the provision of prekindergarten programs. Unserved and underserved minority groups are in particular need of more high quality services. In Virginia, for example, concern has arisen regarding the wide disparity in quality and scope of the state's educational programs.
3. Meeting Community Needs: Across the nation, each state and local community varies markedly on several dimensions such as program goals, sponsorship, length of service, source of

funding, and nature of services provided. This heterogeneity of services is often considered necessary to meet the diverse needs of all community groups and all children. Kentucky's Early Childhood Education and Development Task Force recommended the formation of local early childhood advisory groups to shape each community's own individualized program.

4. Providing Flexibility of Programming and Services: Because four-year-old children vary significantly in their behaviors, interests, and abilities, prekindergarten programs are not uniform in their provisions of programming and services. Rather, they increasingly attempt to provide a flexible range of such services in order to meet the unique needs of each child. In Kentucky, for example, their task force specified that children's programs be developmentally appropriate and include a built-in research and evaluation component to ensure a maximum degree of success for the program and for the children it serves.

5. Disseminating Information: Serving four-year-old children in the public schools is a highly personal and controversial issue. Public sentiment regarding the state's or agency's role in educating preschool children is extremely diverse at the present time. Careful and long-range planning, thus, is often necessary to acquaint the public with the cost-advantage and importance, both to the community and its children, of prekindergarten programming in public schools.

6. Credentialing Individuals and Programs: Serious disparities currently exist in the means by which individuals and programs are credentialed. Ten states and Washington, D. C. now require that at least one member of a child care center staff hold either a BA or BS college degree. Only three of these states require that the degree be in early childhood education; however, the national Child Development Associate (CDA) credential and an associate degree in early childhood are two additional staff options.

   The Connecticut Committee on Four-Year-Olds recently recommended that the state board of education, with input from other agencies, take a major role in developing a consistent position on credentialing early childhood personnel and programs. Virginia has proposed that teacher education requirements for graduation and certification be made more rigorous, substantive, and interesting. Kentucky's task force recommended that all the programs be served by teachers holding time-limited early childhood state certification.

7. Establishing a Data Base: There currently exists no single data source on preschool children. The data that is available is often incomplete and inconsistent. An expansion of services and programs may require that the state department of education collaborate with other agencies to establish data-gathering mechanisms for preschool children and their families.

8. Involving, Educating, and Supporting the Family: The young child is influenced by a social network that includes the parents, extended family, neighbors, friends, school, and community. For all children and, in particular, "at-risk" children, more intensive family and community services are necessary if the impact of the child's early educational experiences is to be realized. Parents need to feel welcome and to become actively involved in prekindergarten programs. Parent education, training, and resource and referral services are among the services now offered by the schools to all families in several states. Kentucky's task force recommends the use of: (1) a uniform screening model to determine program eligibility; (2) parent surveys to determine need; and (3) evaluations for the program, the family, and each preschool child enrolled in the program.

Additional Considerations

In light of current impetus for state legislatures to consider bills that add local and state resources to child care and prekindergarten programs, many states, including Virginia, Tennessee, Kentucky, and West Virginia, are addressing certain vital concerns. Funding for early education through the school system is deemed most desirable if:

- The funds add to the total resources for early education programs (not reducing funds for Head Start and other social service systems).
- Schools elect to institute these prekindergarten programs.
- Early childhood experts are involved in cooperative planning with the schools and the community.

- Teacher compensation is competitive with other occupations requiring similar college preparation.*
- Schools have the option to contract with an existing prekindergarten program, perhaps allowing parents to select the program of their choice.
- Standards are established, including staff-child ratios, group sizes, and quality programming.
- Adequate per-child reimbursements are established and enforced.
- The needs of children whose parents are employed on a fulltime basis are met.

The addition of full-day prekindergarten programs is an option some schools are adopting. Tennessee's prekindergarten program, for instance, meets Monday through Friday, from 8:30 a.m.-2:30 p.m. In some states, programs begin even earlier and end later to accommodate working parents' needs. At the Horace Mann Infant-Toddler Center in Burbank, California, the day begins at 6:30 a.m. and ends at 7:00 p.m. A testament to its success and the community's need: over 400 children are on the center's waiting list.

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*In several states, including Tennessee, teachers and aides are paid by the state department of education through the local education agency. Virginia's task force specifically recommends that compensation for early childhood teachers be competitive with other occupations requiring similar college preparation.

CONCLUSION

If state education policymakers are resourceful and work with communities to decide what kinds of preschool programs are best for local children, they can help to coordinate and fund high quality public school prekindergarten programs. These efforts have met with a high degree of success in almost half of the nation's states.

For every community, however, formal prekindergarten programs may not be appropriate or even desirable. School systems may not be interested in providing education for all four-year-old children. Many educators and parents, for example, are concerned about an increasingly academic emphasis in kindergarten programs; they fear that formal prekindergarten programs may actually be detrimental to some children.

For disadvantaged or "at-risk" children, there are three primary reasons for providing quality early intervention services: (1) to enhance the child's overall development; (2) to provide family support and assistance; and (3) to maximize the child's and family's social and economic contributions to society.

As state policymakers make decisions about important issues affecting schooling for all children, the child's developmental needs, family resources, and community facilities all deserve careful consideration. Allocation of funds and distribution of services can then be determined on an equitable basis. Only by experiencing this equity and equality of programming will all preschool children begin to realize their inherent birthright: excellence in education.

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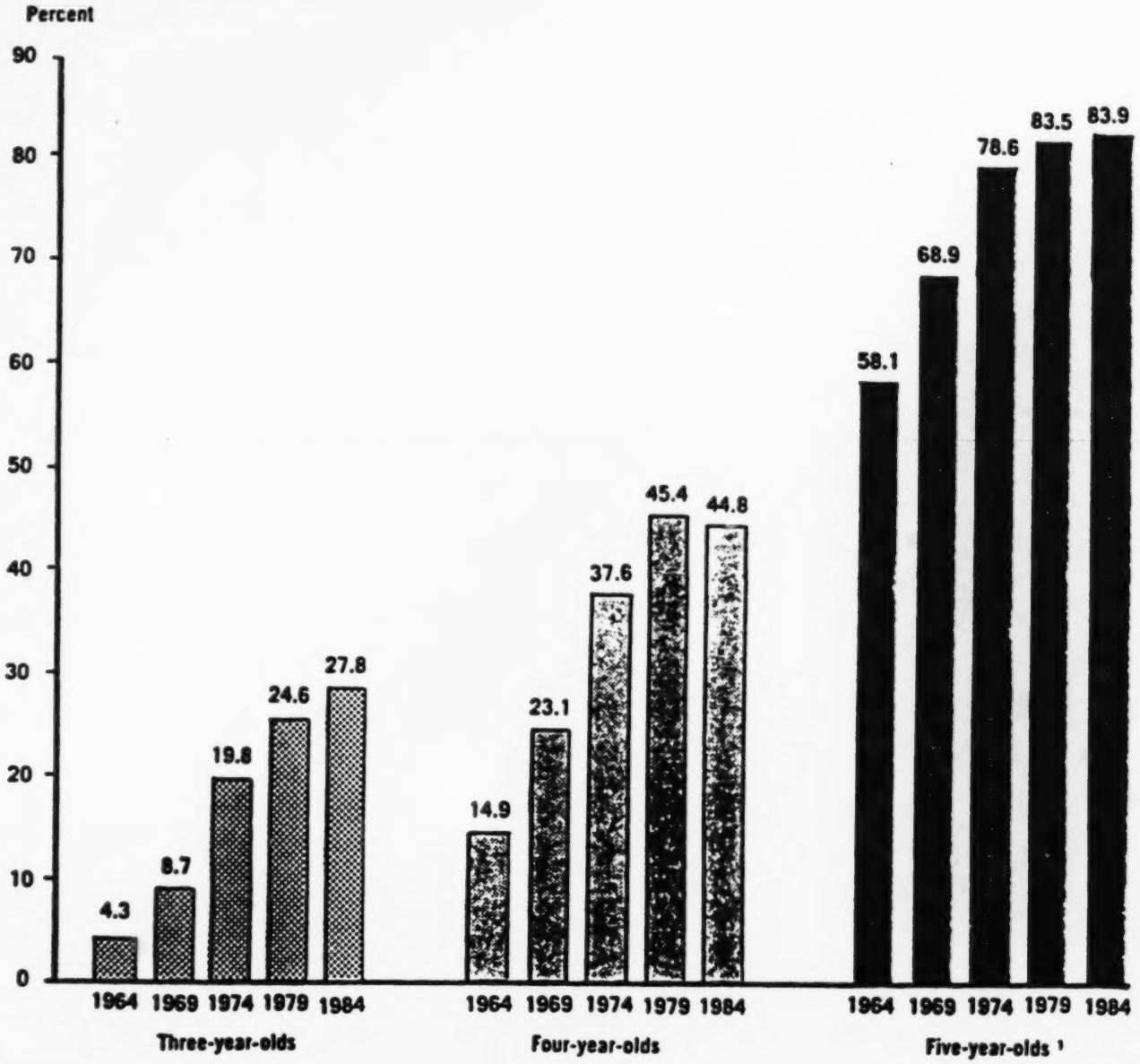
Appendix A

Percent of 3-, 4-, and 5-year-old children enrolled in preprimary programs: United States, October 1964 to October 1984



[1]Excludes 5-year-olds enrolled above the kindergarten level.

Sources: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, reports on *Preprimary Enrollment*; U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Current Population Reports*, Series P-20, No. 360, and unpublished data.

Appendix B

Representative State Funding Allocations for 1985-1986

State	Dollars (in millions)	Number of Children Served	Type of Public School Service
California	32.7	19,325	[1]Comprehensive half-day services
Louisiana	2.4	2.400	[1]$30,000 provided for each of the 80 half-day programs
Maryland	2	2,213	[1]Programs for disadvantaged children; eligibility limited to school districts providing services
Massachusetts	[2]2.8 [3]10.2	[2]8,000 [3]over 100 communities	[2]Head Start services [3]Direct services; parent services, contracts with day care centers
Minnesota	4	50,000	Parents of preschool children served through public schools
New Jersey	4	1,000	Self-contained classrooms
New York	20	50,000	[4]Comprehensive services; public school prekindergarten program: state: 11% of funding; federal: 89% of funding
Oklahoma	599 (thousand)	720	Pilot prekindergarten in local districts that participate on a voluntary basis
South Carolina	5.3	5,900	[1]4-year-olds with readiness deficiencies served on a half-day (minimum) basis

[1]Indicates services to "at-risk" children. States select vulnerable or at-risk children by using (a) family or demographic characteristics and (b) screening results that have been associated with school failure.

[2]In Massachusetts, state funds have been allocated to retain and attract Head Start staff members.

[3]1986-1987 allocations.

[4]Comprehensive services are similar to those provided by Head Start for prekindergarten program participants. Head Start provides an education program, health services, parent programs, and social services to families.